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Love Letter

Susan H. Kim

University of the Pacific

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“Love Letter” || **SUSAN H. KIM**

The city on an island. It's a small and narrow island, but it's enough to support the weight of all my memories that have embedded themselves into the skyscrapers and subway stairwells, back alleys and cobblestone roads, lofty trees and bridges.

14th St. My mother would occasionally take advantage of me being in the city and ask to bring back a new food item for her. Acai berries, cannoli, starfruit, and most recently, gorgonzola cheese. I was buying a loaf of rosemary bread for her from the Tuesday farmer's market when I noticed the little moustached faces pasted on the ground. Someone had copied hundreds of the same image and painstakingly formed a trail with the faces. Holding my bread and dodging people bustling on the sidewalk,

I kept my eyes on the faces and stepped alongside the whiskered pictures. It wasn't until I reached the end of Union Square when I suddenly wondered whether the person who made the faces was hiding somewhere, watching me follow his trail. Looking up, I warily eyed the grandmother with her carpetbag and the two businessmen chatting in front of a restaurant, and walked back up the street.

Central Park. Derek and I entered into the tunnel of trees, and the thick foliage muffled all sounds of traffic. You could barely discern the frustrated honks of taxis from the chattering of squirrels that reigned in the park. It became clear we didn't know our way around the sprawling green maze. A merry-go-round emerged from behind an outcropping of rock, bike tunnels beckoned to us, a statue of Alice in Wonderland distracted us from the kite flyers on the field, a wide lake with rowboats reflected the tops of the skyscrapers. The entire afternoon passed by us as we wandered without purpose. Only when we couldn't ignore our rumbling stomachs and aching soles any longer did we emerge from the otherworldly park back into the bustling hum of the streets.

Canal St. Station. I flew down the stairs and sprinted into the subway car right before the doors slid shut. Timing the stops between the stations was an art I couldn't perfect, thus I was always on the verge of missing every train. The summer humidity was even

more stifling underground. As I stood alongside the other passengers, holding onto the metal pole and swaying with the subway's turns, I could feel the sweat beginning to bead on my back. It tickled torturously down, but the people pinned around me prevented me from moving my arms to stop the slow agony. While the train stalled at Canal St. Station, I looked the window to distract myself from the smothering heat and noticed a small shadow by the floor outside. It separated from the dark and darted under the wooden benches before the wave of feet stepped onto the platform. The subway must have ultimately decided it was time to introduce me to the rodent inhabitants of the city, and for that, I felt a strange combination of disgust and satisfaction.

The Bowery. Friday nights cast a glow on everything. The senses are enhanced and the food taste heavenly, the music sounds wilder, the people seem more endearing. I leaned against the wall and reveled in how delicious my dulce de leche macaron tasted as everyone waited for the opening band to enter the stage. A mecca for independent music lovers, the venue was always packed with the most interesting crowd. Brooklyn hipsters, Meatpacking District clubbers, and East Village students all socialized together in this room in anticipation of these weekly concerts. The guy leaning against the wall in front of me was eating a huge burrito, and the way he was biting into it made me suddenly need to have such an appetizing

burrito. Just as I was staring, he turned around and spotted my leftover macaron. His eyes lit up and he began exclaiming about how he always wanted to try a macaron. It was a destined match, and we promptly traded our food.

The American Museum of Natural History. The grand white steps that led up to the museum always seemed imposing to me. Whenever I was in Upper West Side, I would walk by the entrance and wonder how a single building could possibly contain all of the world's history; but I would never enter because I was afraid of the answer. I avoided this museum and instead visited the Met, Guggenheim, MOMA, and every other museum in the city until my options ran out. Sunday morning, I finally entered this museum. Gazing into the never-ending displays in the infinite hallways and rooms, I strove to process as much information my eyes could take in just one day. After lunchtime, I was searching for the display of the eskimos that Holden Caulfield mentioned in *Catcher in the Rye*, when I stumbled upon the blue whale. I stood at the entrance of the great, domed chamber, gazing at the suspended life-size model that filled the entire space from mouth to tail. For what must have been minutes, I continued to just simply stand before the whale without speaking. The sheer immensity of realizing that there were living beings as majestic as the blue whale was overwhelming. Only in this city should I have expected to have an

encounter with a whale.

Whenever I walk through the streets, all my past recollections that I had forgotten rush back to me. It's so cliché and typical to eulogize about the city but in my mind, my memories helped build this island. There's a reason that it is called the greatest city in the world. New York, I love you.
